

National Elk Refuge News – June 7, 2006

Visitor Center Staff Training



Employees and volunteers working at the Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center participated in seasonal training last week, expanding their knowledge of the area in a fun and innovative way that got them out into the community visiting a variety of sites. The Visitor Center, located at 532 N. Cache Street in Jackson, serves over 300,000 visitors per year and includes staff from the National Elk Refuge, Bridger-Teton National Forest, Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce and the Grand Teton Natural History Association.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who oversees the Visitor Center, hosted the training session, giving agency partners an opportunity to provide updates and share information. Because many

of the Visitor Center partner organizations have returning employees and volunteers this season, this year's annual training was more interactive and allowed the staff from the various agencies to spend time together "away from the desk."

Thirty-five staff members were divided into four groups and sent out on a four-hour information scavenger hunt to research the areas of natural history, activities and lodging, restaurants and

shopping, and Jackson Hole history. In addition to gathering written responses to specific questions, the teams were each given a digital camera to photodocument their excursion. Their pictures were downloaded onto a computer and used as an introduction to the group's report, presented to the whole staff when they reassembled later in the day.

"It's delightful to have a fresh approach to relearning the things you take for granted. It makes you fall in love with the place all over again."

— Jamie Meyer, fifth year
Grand Teton National History
Association sales staff



“This is our fourth season here,” said National Elk Refuge volunteers Bing and Bunny Bassett,” but we were still able to bring back plenty of new information to share with visitors. It was a great way to gather information.”



“You might not use the information every day, but you get a background that makes you feel more confident when talking with visitors.”

*— Ron Meyer,
fifth year
Grand Teton
National History
Association
sales staff*

The Jackson Hole & Greater Yellowstone Visitor Center serves as a model for interagency cooperation in providing visitor services. All staff members are trained on the Grand Teton Natural History Association’s sales computers; History Association employees routinely answer questions about area activities, lodging and recreation. “We pride ourselves in never saying, ‘I don’t know anything about that – that’s a different agency,’” explains Lori Iverson, Outdoor Recreation Planner for the National Elk Refuge. “It’s a team effort to take care of the visitors.”

Jan Lynch, Executive Director for the Grand Teton Natural History Association, also recognizes

the value of the interagency partnerships and the benefit to the visitor. “I know when my staff is busy, there will be someone there to back them up and help out,” explains Lynch. “Likewise, I know the History Association staff will jump in and share the information responsibilities. We all share the goal to enhance the visitor’s experience, whether it’s through the Association’s educational materials or a one-to-one conversation.”

Additional partners who support the Visitor Center through displays and funding include the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation

and the North American Moose Foundation.

All the participants in the training agreed it was an outstanding way to research information and enjoy the camaraderie. “The collective knowledge and enthusiasm of this group is unparalleled,” adds Kristen Gilbert, Visitor Center Manager. “We’re looking forward to another great season.”

Visitor Center summer hours of operation are from 8:00 AM to 7:00 PM daily.



“There’s a value for the staff to get out and experience firsthand the activities they may be suggesting to visitors.”

*— Jan
Hutchinson,
Jackson Hole
Chamber of
Commerce
Membership &
Visitor Services
Manager*



“We learned more in one month working at the Visitor Center than in 25 years of visiting here.”

*— Bud Hamm,
second year
National Elk
Refuge volunteer*



Menors Ferry

"When you go out and see something, you absorb more information."

— John Aiken, second year Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce Visitor Services staff.



Moose Visitor Center

"We're glad to be able help staff the Visitor Center in town during the summer. It's an important partnership."

— Carolyn Richard, Grand Teton National Park Chief of Interpretation.



Kelly Road

"It was nice to learn new things in a different environment than our regular work setting. We enjoyed one another's company while we learned even more about the area."

— Sara Miller, fourth year National Elk Refuge volunteer